CENSORSHIP AND NEWS CONTROL AS A METHOD OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN THE UNITED STATES: 1914 to 1917

A Thesis

Presented to

The Graduate Division

Drake University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in History

by

Glen D. Jesse

January 1968

CENSORSHIP AND NEWS CONTROL AS A METHOD OF BRITISH PROPAGANDA IN THE UNITED STATES: 1914 to 1917

by

Glen D. Jesse

Approved by Committee:

Henry Borzo
Chairman

Walter N. Breyman

Lewis McMurlen

Jack I Canfield
Dean of the Graduate Division

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO BRITISH CENSORSHIP

The mention of World War I brings to the minds of most people a picture of one of the most terrible military struggles that the modern world has had to face. But it should also be remembered that war brought with it more than simply military action, among other things the war brought on a vigorous propaganda campaign waged by all of the belligerent powers. As the United States was the largest, and potentially the most powerful of the neutral states, it was naturally one of the most sought after of the neutral countries. As Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister, said in this regard, "it was a factor so potentially important that its attitude might be decisive in deciding the war in favor of either set of the belligerents."[1]

It is generally felt that one of the major factors in bringing the United States into the war (April 6, 1917) was the success of the British propaganda campaign. It has been

---

[1] Viscount Grey of Fallodon, Twenty-five Years, 1892-1916 (New York: Fredrick A. Stokes Co., 1925), II, 168.

said that, "shrewdly emphasizing all the darker aspects of German conduct and thought, while doing the precise reverse for its own nation's, the British propaganda was a force of real potency in compelling the decision of April."[1] Since the American shift away from neutrality was of such great importance, and since the British propaganda effort was a factor contributing toward that shift, that propaganda effort merits much attention.

Several students of the period have published some outstanding works on the overall subject of propaganda and the war. Notable among these are Horace C. Peterson's, Propaganda for War: The Campaign against American Neutrality 1914-1917, and Harold D. Lasswell's Propaganda Technique in the World War. However, a study of British censorship and news control as a method of propaganda is notably lacking from the studies of propaganda and World War I. It is, therefore, the purpose of this thesis to examine British censorship and news control as a method of propaganda in the United States

---

[1] James Duane Squires, British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914-1917 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), p. 66.

prior to the American involvement in the First World War. An effort will be made to determine whether this campaign was in fact a major factor contributing toward the eventual American involvement.

However, before examining the question of censorship and news control, it is essential that one have a general understanding of the total British propaganda effort in the United States and the relative role of censorship and news control to that campaign.

George Viereck has said, "Propaganda is a campaign camouflaging its origin, its motive, or both, conducted for the purpose of obtaining a specific objective by manipulating public opinion."[1] While the author of this statement was apparently one of the leading figures in the German propaganda campaign, his definition is equally applicable to the British effort. In fact, to a great extent the British propaganda effort seems to more nearly resemble this general definition than did the German propaganda endeavor, for it

---

[1] George Sylvester Viereck, Spreading Germs of Hate (London: Duckworth, 1931), p. 23.

was much more successful in camouflaging both its origin and its motive than was its German counterpart.

The British propaganda campaign began almost at the moment that Great Britain entered the conflict. One of the first British offensive actions of the war (August 5, 1918) was to send out the cable ship Telconia to cut the five German submarine cables that ran through the English Channel.[1] The tremendous importance of this destruction of the German submarine cables to the success of the British propaganda effort will become more and more evident as this study unfolds.

The first move of the British propagandists was, of course, quickly followed by a second. This was the establishment of government control over the press and means of communication within Great Britain. This government control was established by a number of Orders in Council dating from August 8, 1914, and finally by the Defense of the Realm (Consolidation) Act of November 28, 1914.[2]

---

[1] Barbara Tuchman, The Zimmermann Telegram (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 10-11.

[2] W. H. Aggs (Ed.), Chitty's Statutes of Practical Utility, 6th Edition, 1914-1916 (London: Sweet and Maxwell, Limited and Stevens and Sons, Limited, 1917), XVIII, 463.

Thus with the major German methods of communication with the United States cut and the press and means of communication within Great Britain under government control, the British propagandists were able to turn their full attention to convincing the world of the rightousness of the British cause.

An analysis of that propaganda effort would be a relatively simple task if that effort was clearly defined and under the leadership of a single organization. However, as is often the case in any historical study, the problem is not so simple. Censorship of the press and means of communication within Great Britain was established at least as much for purely defensive reasons as for propaganda purposes, and no one organization had total responsibility for the entire propaganda campaign. As one student of the period has described it:

> Until February 1918 British propaganda was carried on by various ministries interested in spreading a point of view, and by Wellington House, "an adjunct of the Foreign Office." In December 1916 a department of information . . . was set up and put in charge of all British propaganda. In February 1918 . . . a Ministry of Information under Lord Beaverbrook replaced

the Department of Information.[1]

In addition, not all of the British propaganda efforts in the United States were carried out by government agencies. Many private organizations engaged in propaganda activities favoring the British cause. Some of the most outstanding of these unofficial propaganda organizations were: (1) the Oxford Faculty, (2) The Parlimentary Recruiting Committee, (3) the Cobden Club, (4) the Fight for Right Movement, (5) a group of Angelican clerics, (6) United Workers, (7) Atlantic Bulletin, (8) Overseas Club, (9) Victoria League, (10) Union of Democratic Control, and (11) The Central Committee for National Patriotic Organizations.[2]

Much of the propaganda work of the British government in neutral countries was carried out by Wellington House under the leadership of Charles Masterman.[3] It was the duty of one branch of Wellington House to carry out the British propaganda campaign in the United States. This branch of Wellington House

---

[1] John L. Martin, International Propaganda; Its Legal and Diplomatic Control (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1958), pp. 34-5.

[2] Squires, op. cit., pp. 17-25.

[3] Ibid., p. 31.

was headed by Sir Gilbert Parker, who later outlined his activities in this endeavor as follows:

> Practically since the day the war broke out . . . I became responsible for American publicity . . . . Among the activities was a report to the British Cabinet on the state of American opinion, and constant touch with the permanent correspondents of American newspapers in England. I also frequently arranged for important public men in England to act for us by interviews in American newspapers . . .
>
> Among other things, we supplied three hundred and sixty newspapers in the smaller cities . . . with an English newspaper . . . . We established contact with the man in the street through interviews, articles, pamphlets, etc.; . . . . We advised and stimulated many people to write articles . . . and established association, by personal correspondence with influential and eminent people of every profession in the United States . . . . Besides an immense private correspondence with individuals, we had our documents and literature sent to great numbers of libraries, Y.M.C.A. societies, universities . . . and newspapers.[1]

It is readily apparent, from what Sir Gilbert Parker had to say about his responsibilities, that the British propaganda activites in the United States were great in quantity and highly diversified in their approach. However, true to Viereck's definition, little was known or said about

---

[1] Sir Gilbert Parker, "The United States and the War," Harper's Magazine, CXXXVI (March, 1918), 522.

the activities of Wellington House before the U. S. involvement. As one author has said in regard to Wellington House, "all public mention of it was sedulously avoided . . . . Even the most direct interpellations in the House of Commons . . . were met by dextrous evasions or by forthright refusal to explain."[1] Yet, despite this cloak of secrecy surrounding the activities of Wellington House, it is still possible to make some generalizations about the overall British propaganda techniques as they were applied against American neutrality.

One of the outstanding characteristics of the British propaganda war was that different approaches were used in an effort to enlist the support of the various segments of American society. The broad body of intellectuals and other influential men in American socity was one of the key targets of the propaganda campaign. As is indicated in Parker's statement, one of the most important methods used in the effort to gain the support of this segment of American

---

[1] Squires, op. cit., p. 29.

society was the use of personal contact. It has been said that the mailing list of Wellington House eventually contained the names of 260,000 influential persons throughout the United States, and that this list, which Parker compiled after studying the American Who's Who, was divided into groupings according to profession, intelligence, and community standing.[1] The quantities of this type of correspondence were, according to Parker, "immense."

The propagandists of Great Britain also attempted to gain the support of the intellectual and influential Americans through a series of speech's, lectures, and private conversations. This propaganda approach was clearly evident in Grey's letter to Theodore Roosevelt of September 10, 1914, when he said:

> J. M. Barrie and A. E. W. Mason, some of whose books you have no doubt read, are going to the United States. Their objective is . . . not to make speeches or give lectures, but to meet people, particularly those connected with Universities, and explain the British case as regards this war and our views of the issues involved.[2]

---

[1] Horace Cornelius Peterson, Propaganda for War; the Campaign against American Neutrality 1914-1917 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1939), p. 16.

[2] Grey, op. cit., p. 143.

This approach was again evident in the letter of Spring Rice, the British Ambassador to Washington, to Lord Newton, dated October 21, 1914, in which he stated, " . . . Two labour members are over here now and are doing a good deal of useful talking in the private line--none public."[1]

The propaganda appeal to the educated and influential men of American society was also evident in the names of some of the men who wrote for Wellington House. Perhaps the most outstanding individual among this group was Lord Bryce, the former British Ambassador to the United States.[2] Bryce had been a very popular Ambassador, and was well known to the intellectual community. In fact, Grey has said in this regard that, "at Washington the personal position of Mr. Bryce was less that of an Ambassador than of a distinguished man of letters."[3] The propaganda writings of such a distinguished man as Lord Bryce would of course have a certain impact upon the intellectuals in American society.

---

[1]Stephen Gwynn (Ed.), The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), II, 239.

[2]Bryce served in this post from 1907 to 1913.

[3]Grey, op. cit., p. 89.

While the intellectuals and other influential men in America were of great importance to the British propagandists, they were by no means the only group toward which the propaganda effort was aimed. A second key target of the campaign was naturally the American politician.

One of the main thrusts of this propaganda appeal was of course aimed at the top of the American political structure, the White House. Colonel House apparently served as one of the routes by which the British propaganda penetrated into the White House. Peterson has said in this regard, "European statesmen believed the Colonel to be influential with Mr. Wilson . . . and so they courted him and praised his astuteness and the wisdom of his words."[1] This view of the role of Colonel House to the propagandists is in part supported by a letter from Grey to Spring Rice dated January 22, 1915, in which he said:

> . . . it is well that he [House] should be informed as to the state of public opinion here . . . . What is felt here is that while Germany deliberately planned a war of pure aggression, has occupied and devastated

---

[1]Peterson, op. cit., p. 182.

> large districts . . . the only act on the part of the United States is a protest . . . .[1]

The propagandists also found that Walter Hines Page, the United States Ambassador in London, could serve to carry their opinion into the White House. In fact, they found Page to be almost as sympathetic to the British cause as were the British themselves.[2] The work of the British propagandists can clearly be seen in Page's letter to his son, Arthur, dated November 6, 1914, in which he stated, "the extent to which the German people have permitted themselves to be fooled is beyond belief. As a little instance of it, I enclose a letter that Lord Bryce gave me . . . ."[3] While it is true that the letter may have been given to Page as an interest item, it should not be forgotten that Lord Bryce was one of the leading writers for the British propaganda

---

[1]Charles Seymour, The Intimate Papers of Colonel House, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1926), I, 347.

[2]Peterson, op. cit., p. 185-6.

[3]Burton J. Hendrick, The Life and Letters of Walter H. Page (Garden City: Garden City Publishing Co., 1927), II, 345. Underlining not in the original. The letter itself stated that Germany was bound to win the war, and when it had, it would destroy all cities even remotely connected with the production of war materials. The letter also stated that within a year Germany would seize the new canal and proclaim its' definance of the Monroe Doctrine. And concluded by saying that as a nation Americans were cowardly and would never fight.

campaign. Thus, the letter may well have been given with the intention of influencing Page's attitude toward the war, and also in the hope that Page might forward it to Wilson, as indeed he did.

The American Ambassador wrote many letters to people other than his son. Many of these letters went directly to the President. Of these letters to Wilson, it has been said that:

> Page's early letters had furnished the President ideas which had taken shape in Wilson's policies, and disagreeable as the communications now became, there are evidences that they influenced the . . . White House, and that they had much to do in finally forcing Mr. Wilson into the war.[1]

It should, however, also be noted that this opinion of the effectiveness of Page's letters to Wilson is open to some debate. In fact, Peterson has said that, " . . . Wilson deliberately ignored some of the reports of Ambassador Page . . . . "[2] It is nonetheless significant that Page was apparently completely won over to the English cause. It was significant because Page was one of the President's

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 23-4.

[2] Peterson, op. cit., p. 187.

primary sources of information concerning the state of affairs in Europe.

The propaganda appeal to the American politician was also aimed at politicians outside of the Administration. Among these Theodore Roosevelt was perhaps one of the most outstanding. It has already been observed that Roosevelt and Grey were in direct communication, and an extract from Grey's letter to Roosevelt of October 20, 1914, showed them to be in complete agreement:

> Your idea, that the United States might have come forward on the eve of the outbreak of the war to uphold Treaty rights, makes me glow at the thought of what might have been achieved.[1]

It must, however, also be noted that not all of the American politicians were as completely won over to the British cause as Roosevelt and Page. Senator Stone of Missouri was one example of this when he charged on January 8, 1915, that the United States was pursuing a policy which favored Great Britain as opposed to Germany.[2]

---

[1] Grey, op. cit., 145.

[2] "Official Correspondence Relating to the Censorship of Telegrams Transmitted by Cable and Wireless," American Journal of International Law, IX (July, 1915), special supplement, pp. 253-4.

Bryan is still another example of the American politician who did not fall victim to the propagandists' appeal. After his resignation as Secretary of State on June 7, 1915, Bryan toured the nation speaking for peace and against American involvement. These examples clearly illustrate that while the British propaganda appeal found some success among the American politicians, it was not universally successful.

The British propaganda appeal was also aimed at a third key segment of American society--the man on the street. As the statement by Sir Gilbert Parker (page 6) makes clear, the appeal to the average man was of great importance to the success of the propaganda effort. To reach the average man the propagandists used any of the following as their more important techniques: (1) newspapers, (2) cinema, (3) interviews, (4) articles, (5) pamphlets, (6) letters, and (7) strategically placed documents.[1]

As this was a period before the rise of such mass

---

[1] Parker, op. cit., p. 522.

media as radio and television, the newspaper was perhaps the most important medium through which the propagandists could reach the man on the street. The great importance of the newspaper to the propaganda effort would seem to be evidenced by Parker's statement that his activities included supplying three hundred and sixty smaller American newspapers with an English paper, and his being in "constant touch with the permanent correspondents of American newspapers in England."[1] As will be seen, the British took full advantage of their geographic position to give the war news in America a distinctly English point of view.

It can clearly be seen that the British propaganda effort was aimed at three large overall groupings of American society, but it should also be pointed out that in many cases the propaganda appeal was aimed at still smaller sub-groupings within the larger general divisions of society. Thus, as Peterson pointed out, extensive efforts were made in the religious field, especially among

---

[1] Idem.

Episcopalians and Catholics.[1] The great diversity of the American society made it necessary for the propagandists to employ a great diversity in their techniques to gain the support of the majority of the citizens of the United States.

Despite this great diversity in their propaganda appeals, it is interesting to note that the propaganda techniques used by the British fall neatly in line with the basic techniques of propaganda as outlined by Lasswell in his study of propaganda and the world war. Lasswell listed the following as the "common denominator" propaganda techniques of the majority of the countries engaged in propaganda campaigns: (1) the opposing country was nearly always made to appear overbearing and contemptuous, (2) the enemy was insolent and sordid, (3) the enemy was perfidious, (4) the enemy always conducted a lying propaganda, (5) the enemy was always quarrelsome, crude, and destructive, and (6) the enemy was cruel and degenerate in his conduct of

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., p. 28.

the war.[1]

The following British propaganda techniques and appeals were clearly discernible in their campaign to enlist American support: (1) war guilt; it was made to appear that Germany alone had started the war, (2) Germany was made to appear to have reprehensible ambitions, (3) it was made to appear that Great Britain would win the war, (4) damnation, the enemy was made to appear as militaristic villains, (5) compassion, and effort was made to arouse the sympathy of the United States, (6) an effort was made to make it appear as though the United States and Great Britain shared identical interests in the war, and (7) an effort was made to make it appear that the enemy was guilty of war crimes.[2] The great similarity between this list of basic British propaganda techniques and Lasswell's "common denominator" techniques is readily apparent.

Of the basic propaganda techniques used by Great Britain several require no further comment, but at least

---

[1] Harold D. Lasswell, Propaganda Techniques in the War (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1927), pp. 77-81.

[2] Peterson, op. cit., pp. 35-64.

three of these techniques were of such great importance to the total propaganda effort that they merit further consideration.

It has been said that, "when the public believes that the enemy began the war and blocks a permanent . . . peace, the propagandist has achieved his purpose."[1] The point of statement was, of course, not overlooked by the British propaganda organization. It became one of the major efforts of the British propagandists to make it appear as though Germany alone was responsible for the war. This effort was aimed at all segments of American society from Wilson and House to the most obscure farmer in the middle-west. It has already been noted on January 22, 1915, Grey informed his Ambassador in Washington that House should be informed that, " . . . Germany has deliberately planned a war of pure aggression."[2] And, it can be assumed that the British newspapers which Sir Gilbert Parker supplied to three hundred and sixty newspapers in smaller American cities

---

[1] Ibid., p. 77.

[2] Seymour, Vol. I, loc. cit.

also contained these charges of German "war guilt."

One of the best examples of British "war guilt" propaganda is to be found in Lord Bryce's introduction to The War of Democracy: The Allies Statement, in which he wrote:

> So far as Britain was concerned, it was the invasion of Belgium that ended all efforts to avert war, and made the friends of peace themselves join in holding that the duty of fulfilling their treaty obligations to a weak State was paramount to every other consideration.[1]

The reader of this statement was clearly led to believe that Great Britain entered the war for only the noblest of reasons--the German invasion of Belgium.

Apparently, to a great extent, the "war guilt" propaganda was successful. As one student of the period has pointed out, "the Central Powers maneuvered themselves into the uncomfortable posture of apologists, leaving the Allies the easier task of attack on moral grounds."[2] The war

---

[1] The War of Democracy: The Allies Statement (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page, and Company, 1917), p. 24; also to be found in: Viscount James Bryce, "Teachings of General von Bernhardi," New York Times Current History, the European War, (New York: The New York Times Company, 1915), I, 344.

[2] Frederic Logan Paxson, American Democracy and the World War, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1936), I, 166.

guilt clause of the Treaty of Versailles gives ample testimony to the success of the propagandists.

A second of the British propaganda techniques worthy of special note is that of "identity of interest." It was intended that this approach would make the people in the United States feel that the British were fighting "our fight." Peterson has said of this aspect of the British propaganda campaign:

> Every possible effort was made to make Americans feel that the war was 'our fight.' Every possible point of similarity between the two countries was stressed and re-stressed . . . . A vital part of these arguments was the contention that Great Britain and the United States were sister democracies.[1]

An excellent example of the British "identity of interest" propaganda is to be found in Lord Bryce's introduction to The War of Democracy, in which he stated:

> This is a war of Principles, moral, and political, in which every man in neutral countries who has a sense of his personal duties to humanity ought to try to find the truth . . . so that the sentiment of his country would cast its weight on the side of truth and humanity.[2]

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., p. 35.

[2] "The War of Democracy," op. cit., p. xi.

Even the title of this book, The War of Democracy, indicated that the struggle was "our fight," for was the United States not a sister democracy.

Unlike the "war guilt" propaganda, the "identity of interest" propaganda has no clause in the peace treaty attesting to its success. It is, however, of some significance that the United States did eventually enter the war on the side of the "democracies" against Germany and her allies. It cannot be said that the British "identity of interest" propaganda was alone responsible for this course of events, but it should at least be noted that a great propaganda effort was made to achieve just such a result.

The final propaganda technique to be given further consideration is that of war crimes said to have been committed by the enemy soldiers. William McAdoo, the President's son-in-law and a member of the Cabinet, wrote of this propaganda technique:

> The main idea was to create an impression that the Germans were barbarians, and the picture was built up carefully . . . . The British agents managed to make a large part of the American people

> believe that German soldiers had cut off the hands of Belgian children.[1]

As Secretary McAdoo has suggested, many Americans came to believe that the atrocity stories were true and almost beyond dispute. No less a person than the American Ambassador to London expressed belief in the atrocity reports when he wrote to Wilson on September 11, 1914:

> Accounts of atrocities are so much a part of war that for some time I did not believe the unbelievable reports that were sent from Europe . . . . But American and other neutral observers who have seen these things in France and especially in Belgium now convince me that the Germans have perpetrated some of the most barbarous deeds in history . . . .[2]

Perhaps the most outstanding use of the atrocity story as a propaganda technique was found in the famous Bryce Report. It has been said by a number of students of the period that by using the respectable name of Lord Bryce on the atrocity report it "put scepticism out of question . . . ."[3] Words like the following, when spoken by such

---

[1] Squires, op. cit., p. 67.

[2] Hendrick, op. cit., p. 325-6.

[3] Peterson, op. cit., p. 58. One of a number of such statements.

an eminent person as Lord Bryce could well have convinced millions that the Germans were indeed barbarians:

> All along the line of their march innocent civilians, old men, women, and children as well as other inhabitants were slaughtered on the pretext that some persons in the towns and villages had shot at the invading force . . . .
>
> Shocking outrages were committed upon women, and that by officers as well as soldiers, and little effort was made to restrain or punish such crimes, which were often committed under the influence of liquor.[1]

Indeed, some measure of the success of this type propaganda is to be found in the tremendous response and outpouring of aid that the Americans gave to the people of Belgium through the Committee for Relief in Belgium.

However, before dismissing the question of atrocity stories as a propaganda technique, something should be said with regard to the validity of the various charges made. First, as Page has pointed out, atrocity stories are, perhaps with some justification, a normal product of war. Secondly, the description of drunken German soldiers and officers as given by Lord Bryce hardly coincides with the stern

---

[1] "The War of Democracy," op. cit., p. xv.

discipline which is presumably necessary to move such a large army so far and so fast while at war. And, finally it should also be pointed out that many of the atrocity stories were never actually proven to be true. In fact, there is evidence to indicate that many of these stories were simply not true. As one student of the period has reported:

> A group of dependable journalists, caught in Germany by the war, Rodger Lewis, Irving S. Cobb, Harry Hansen, James O'donnell Bennett, and John McCutchen, united September 3 "in declaring German atrocities groundless as far as we are able to observe." Subsequent attempts to establish them . . . have in general failed . . . .[1]

Perhaps the words which Peterson used to summarize his feelings about the Bryce Report can also be applied to the accuracy of the atrocity reports, "It was in itself one of the worst atrocities of the war."[2]

This then is a general overview of the total British propaganda effort in the United States in the years from 1914 to 1917. However, the question still remains as to

---

[1] Paxson, op. cit., p. 168.

[2] Peterson, op. cit., p. 58.

why the British were for the most part successful in their propaganda effort.

Some of the possible reasons for the success of Great Britain are: (1) there was a pro-British attitude among many leading Americans, (2) the British propaganda was unobtrusive and artistically presented, and (3) the British control over the conventional channels of American communication and public opinion made it unnecessary for them to compete on an equal footing with the German propagandists.[1]

The latter is of particular importance to this study. It has been said that, "News is the most important tool of the propagandists."[2] To gain complete control over the information which filtered into America from the war zone, the British established a most comprehensive system of news control and censorship.

It is to that system of news control and censorship that this study now turns in an effort to examine its' function and its' results.

---

[1] Ibid., p. 33.

[2] Martin, op. cit., p. 17.

CHAPTER II

THE IMPLEMENTATION, ORGANIZATION, AND PROPAGANDA OBJECTIVES OF CENSORSHIP AND NEWS CONTROL

One of the more interesting facets of the British use of censorship and news control as a method of propaganda was that the groundwork for this effort was made even before the war had errupted. The Press Censorship Committee, made up of representatives of the War Office, the Admiralty, and the press, was formed sometime in 1913 for the express purpose of supervising a voluntary agreement with the press for the withholding of information whose publication would be undesirable to the national interest.[1]

It is also interesting to note that Rear-Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg was asked in the spring of 1914 to accept an appointment as Chief Naval Censor of Radio-Telegraphy in the event of mobilization.[2] In this capacity he placed the censorship apparatus into motion on August 1, 1914,

---

1 N. B. Dearle, Dictionary of Official War-Time Organizations (London: Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 1928), p. 310.

2 Rear-Admiral Sir Douglas Brownrigg, Bt., Indiscretions of the Naval Censor (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1920), p. 16.

when it was announced that Great Britain was placing wireless telegraphy under "such rules as may be made by the Admiralty."[1] At approximately the same time an organization was established under the leadership of Sir Alfred Ewing for the study of German wireless messages when taken in."[2]

The British efforts to establish control over the use of wireless was greatly aided by the actions of the United States. This aid came first on August 5, 1914, when President Wilson issued an executive order prohibiting the unneutral use of any wireless stations located on United States territory.[3] This was followed on September 5, 1914, by an executive order in which the United States assumed direct control over those radio stations in the United States that were capable of communicating with Europe. This executive order also forbade the use of any code or

---

1 British and Foreign State Papers, 1914 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1917) CVII, 65.

2 Winston S. Churchill, The World Crisis (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932), p. 503.

3 American Journal of International Law, op. cit., p. 115.

or cipher in messages sent by this wireless system.[1]

Wireless had remained as the only rapid means of German communication with the United States after the British cut the German trans-Atlantic cables. Thus, when the United States seized the German wireless stations at Tuckerton, New Jersey, and at Sayville, Long Island, while taking no similar action against British cables, they greatly aided the British censorship and news control efforts. Indeed, when there was much criticism of Wilson in England for his opposition to the British contraband list, Spring Rice was found to have defended Wilson on the basis of the position he had taken toward the German wireless stations. As Spring Rice said, " . . . he stopped the use by the Germans of their wireless installations . . . and this is enough."[2]

Censorship did not, of course, end with the wireless. For, the German trans-Atlantic cables were cut as Great Britain entered the war, and several weeks later the Liberial-

---

[1] Ibid., p. 116.

[2] Stephen Gwynn (Ed.), The Letters and Friendships of Sir Cecil Spring Rice, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1929), II, 243-4.

Brazil cable was also cut. The later had served as an alternative route for German cables bound for America after the German owned trans-Atlantic cables had been cut. However, when this cable route was also cut, the only submarine cables left in operation connecting Europe and the United States were those of the Allies--mostly Great Britain's.[1] It was, therefore, a relatively simple task for England to impose censorship over most of the cable messages passing between Europe and the United States.

This censorship was established early in the war when Great Britain gave notice through the International Bureau at Berne to the effect that Great Britain was suspending the transmission of telegrams and radiograms through its' territories.[2] It was added, however, that England would allow the transmission of those messages

---

[1] Tuchman, op. cit., p. 11. Apparently one French cable remained in operation at least part of the time, and a cable also came to the United States from Siveria, but this route was apparently much too expensive for normal use.

[2] Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1915 Special Supplement (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1927), p. 707. (Hereinafter referred to as FRUS)

sent by the various governments and private citizens, provided that the messages be in plain language, either English or French, and also on the understanding that they would be received only at the senders' risk and that they would be subject to censorship.[1]

The power to impose this censorship was granted through an order in council on August 8, 1914, and later by the Defense of the Realm Consolidation Act of November 28, 1914.[2] This act stated in part that no person shall "make false statements likely to . . . prejudice his majesty's relations with foreign powers,"[3] and, in order to enforce this law, the power of search and seizuere was given to the "competent naval or military authority."[4] Armed with this sweeping power the government was free to establish a comprehensive and elaborate censorship and news control system.

Shortly after August 4, 1914, the Press Bureau (Press Censorship) was founded by the government to replace the

---

1 Idem.

2 British State Papers, op. cit. p. 19.

3 Aggs, op. cit., p. 465-6.

4 Ibid., p. 469.

pre-war Press Censorship Committee. It was the duty of the Press Bureau, taking orders from both the War Office and the Admiralty, to supervise the issuing of news to and by the press, and to prevent information of value from falling into enemy hands.[1] The exact date upon which this all important news control and censoring body began operations is not clear, but Rear-Admiral Brownrigg has stated that he was asked to represent the Admiralty on this body the night of August 5, 1914, less than twenty-four hours after England had entered the war.[2] It can be seen that the British wasted no time in establishing control over the war news, including that bound for the United States.

Press censorship did not end with the Press Bureau, for a second press censorship body also came into operation soon after England entered the war. This press censorship department was formed by the Home Office to censor that part of the news not censored by the military.[3]

---

1 Dearle, loc. cit.

2 Brownrigg, op. cit., p. 19.

3 Dearle, op. cit., p. 121.

In addition to the above mentioned press censors, a regular government censoring organization was founded soon after the war broke out. It was the object of this body, under the direct control of the Army Council, to censor private and commercial messages in an effort to prevent information of value from reaching the enemy, and also to acquire information for British use.[1] Naturally this form of censorship covered both the mails and telegrams, either by wireless or cable, and applied to all such messages that came within the jurisdiction of this body. That jurisdiction included all such messages originating in the United Kingdom, those messages that were simply passing through their territory, and all such messages on board vessels which were forced to land in Great Britain for search and seizure.

As was the case with press dispatches, little time was wasted in imposing censorship over private and commercial messages. It has already been mentioned that wireless

---

[1] Ibid., p. 298.

messages were placed under British censorship on August 1, 1914, even before England had declared war. It is not clear as to the exact date at which cable messages were first placed under government censorship, but most evidence indicates that it was in operation within a few days after Great Britain declared war.[1] Censorship of the mails was somewhat slower in taking effect. It has been said that mail censorship was not imposed until August 29, 1914,[2] and then only when pressure from such influential groups as the War Office and the Admiralty had overcome the opposition of some people within the Government. The Government had apparently been reluctant to act in this direction because censorship of this type was, according to Brownrigg, repugent to many, and also because many feared that it would involve England in trouble with the neutrals.[3]

---

1 One example of this evidence is to be found in Walter Millis's Road to War: America 1914-1917, p. 71. He stated that after the German cables were cut, the New York Times was not able to print an uncensored report from Berlin until one was received by wireless on September 5, 1914.

2 Peterson, op. cit., p. 14.

3 Brownrigg, op. cit., p. 199.

Thus, within a month after the war had begun, Great Britain had imposed a comprehensive system of news control and censorship which was capable of controlling much of the information passing between the United States and Europe. Three separate organizations were responsible for the successful operation of this effort, but the three were not totally independent of one another. Brownrigg has pointed out that all doubtful matters were referred to experts, and at least in the case of the Admiralty, a post captain was appointed as naval adviser to the chief censor at the War Office.[1]

At this point the reader may be asking himself what all this has to do with the British propaganda effort. The answer to this question is simply that, "news is the most important tool of the propagandists."[2] Therefore, if the ensuing study is to be meaningful, some knowledge of the censorship organization and what it was hoped that it would

---

[1] Ibid., p. 24.

[2] Martin, loc. cit.

achieve is essential. It should also be pointed out that while the stated objective of the organizations thus far described has been for the most part to prevent valuable information from reaching the enemy, these organizations could equally as well be used to prevent the public, of either Great Britain or the United States, from reading what news the propagandists considered undesirable.

In fact, British censorship and news control apparatus were frequently used in just such a manner. Examples of this use of censorship and news control were abundant. One such example took place on the night of September 8, 1915, when a Zeppelin raided London, it was reported that hardly before the Zeppelin had disappeared from sight word came down from the Press Bureau that no stories about the raid were even to be submitted to the censor, much less published or cabled abroad.[1] The Review of Reviews gave a second example of this British use of censorship to control what Americans read when it

---

[1] G. Shepard, "Forty-Two Centimeter Blue Pencil," Everybody's, XXXVI (April, 1917), p. 479.

reported, " . . . they have censored . . . . their own Prime Minister's speeches and those of the Foreign Minister on the ground that they would create an unfavorable impression abroad."[1]

Censorship of this type was not intended as a means of preventing valuable information from falling into the hands of the enemy, but rather it was intended to aid the efforts of the British propagandists. As was stated in the previous chapter, one of the major British propaganda techniques, to enlist the support of the United States, was the appeal that England was bound to win the war. Since stories like the two examples above would tend to raise certain questions as the eventual outcome of the war, it must be assumed that this was the primary factor for their being suppressed by the British censors. Indeed, though the news of the Zeppelin attack on London was suppressed by the Press Bureau, that same bureau later issued a short, formal statement saying that a Zeppelin

---

[1] Oswald Garrison Villard, "Press as Affected by War," Review of Reviews, LI (January, 1915), 81.

had "visited the eastern counties."[1]

Thus, it may be concluded that while it was a primary objective of the censorship to prevent useful information from reaching the enemy, it was also carried out with a considerable amount of attention given to the propaganda value of each piece of information read by the censor. As one British censor said of his duties:

> And here I sit, because it is wartime, before a large table covered with serried rows of letters, with instructions to open them all and search therein for, first, information likely to be useful to the enemy; secondly, anything likely to discourage recruiting; and thirdly false information likely to alarm or depress a credulous public.[2]

The duel nature of British censorship was also attested to by Rear-Admiral Brownrigg, the Chief Naval Censor of Radiotelegraphy and the Admiralty representative on the Press Bureau, when he wrote:

> It was of the highest national interest during the Great War that information which might be useful to the enemy should be suppressed . . . and though I became involved in propaganda work, which was essential, I was never unconscious of the point of view

---

[1] Shepard, loc. cit.

[2] "What the Censor Senses," Literary Digest, LIII (October 14, 1916), 967.

of the officers in command at sea.[1]

As secrecy was apparently what the naval commanders wanted and needed, Brownrigg suppressed important facts while at the same time arranging Grand Fleet tours for correspondents of certain newspapers.

It should also be pointed out that Great Britain's major news control and censorship organization and the major propaganda organization were eventually brought together, although nearly at the end of the period in question, under the leadership of a single department head. This was done sometime in February, 1917, when the Department of Information was formed to "provide a more complete organization for the supplying of information on the cause of, and necessary organization for the war, and to co-ordinate and extend the work of existing departments . . . ."[2] Included in this new organization were the old

---

[1] Brownrigg, op. cit., p. 103. It might be pointed out that the larger portion of Brownrigg's memoirs concerns his propaganda activities as opposed to his strictly censorship activities.

[2] Dearle, op. cit., p. 128.

Press Bureau and Wellington House, the major propaganda organization.[1]

At this point it should be clear that the British had established a huge censorship and news control organization,[2] but there might still be some question as to what specifically Great Britain hoped to achieve with this organization.

In an attempt to answer this question, the following general goals can be attributed to the British censorship and news control campaign: (1) it was hoped that the censorship would keep valuable information from reaching the enemy, (2) it was hoped that strict British censorship would stop much of the enemies communication with the outside world, (3) it was hoped that the censorship would contribute to the disruption of the enemies' world trade, (4) it was an aim of the censorship to hide the extent of

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., pp. 229-30.

[2] In early 1917 there were said to be thirty-seven hundred people in London alone censoring the mails. Peterson, op. cit., p. 14.

the German victories, (5) it was hoped that the censorship would be of use in obtaining useful information, and (6) it was also hoped that through censorship and news control Great Britain would be able to exert control over much of the news that went to neutral countries.

It is evident from this list of censorship goals and from the preceding discussion that censorship was not imposed for either strictly military or for strictly propaganda reasons. Rather, it was for a combination of reasons that Great Britain resorted to a strict system of censorship and news control.

Such censorship goals as preventing valuable information from falling into enemy hands were primarily based upon military need, and as such they will not be given much consideration in the remainder of this study. However, in the final analysis of the merits of the British censorship and news control effort, it must not be forgotten that these additional reasons for the censorship did exist and were of great importance to the total military effort.

It is to those censorship goals that were either in part or in whole motivated for reasons of propaganda that

this study now turns. This will be done in an effort to evaluate the extent to which the British were successful in achieving these censorship and news control goals.

CHAPTER III

THE SUCCESSES OF CENSORSHIP AND NEWS CONTROL AS A METHOD OF PROPAGANDA

What success the British propagandists were able to achieve through the use of censorship and news control were based to a great extent upon the events in this area during the first months of the war. For, as described in the previous chapter, the groundwork for the British censorship and news control apparatus was established in the first months of the conflict.

The events in this area during the first month of the war also contributed greatly to the British objective of depriving the enemy of as much outside communication as was possible. It was of great importance to the British that the enemy be without outside communication for both military and propaganda reasons. The military reasons for depriving the enemy of his means of communication are outside of the scope of this thesis, but it might at least be well to note that one of the first Allied complaints to the United States concerned the military use of German wireless stations located in the United States. It was

contended that these stations were being used to direct German ships at sea.[1] As was noted in the previous chapter, the United States responded punctually to these charges and seized the German wireless stations.

This event, coupled with the British cutting of the German trans-Atlantic cables and later the British censorship of the mails, meant in effect that Great Britain could exert considerable control over the German communications with the United States.

This British control over German communications with the United States was, of course, not complete control. German messages were still allowed to pass over the wireless route, provided that a copy of the German code was on file with the American Government.[2] And, according to Tuchman, even this restriction could be circumvented by sending German Government communiques in secret code in messages ostensibly signed by German commercial firms.[3] However,

---

[1] Ray Stannard Baker, The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), V, 275.

[2] Tuchman, op. cit., p. 101.

[3] Idem.

even with these loopholes, wireless did not provide Germany and her allies with as much communication with the United States as was needed. Indeed, Peterson has stated that it was not until late 1915 that the Central Powers were able to send material of propaganda value by wireless.[1] This view of the limited value of wireless is supported by J. C. Willever, of Western Union, who wrote to Lansing in June of 1915, that it was impractical for American business firms to use the wireless system because of the higher tolls by wireless ($.62 per word by wireless as opposed to $.25 per word by cable), and also because the wireless system was not really adequate for German and Austro-Hungarian messages alone.[2] He added that at that time the Tuckerton station was about three days behind in the transmission of what messages Western Union was then turning over to it.[3]

A second possible method of German communication

---

1 Peterson, op. cit., p. 135.

2 FRUS, 1915 Supplement, op. cit., p. 717.

3 Idem.

with the United States was through the mails. The British had, of course, imposed censorship over this means of communication within a month after the outbreak of the war. However, as this censorship covered only that mail that either originated in British territory or entered British jurisdiction by landing at any of her various ports, the possible loopholes by this means of communication were immense. Yet, judging by the number of American complaints to Great Britain over her seizure of American mails,[1] it is clear that the British greatly reduced the effectiveness of even this method of German communication with the United States. It might also be noted that as compared to the speed at which messages could be sent by cable and wireless, the mails were a very inferior means of communication.

About the only remaining methods of German-American communications were through the so-called "Swedish roundabout" or by private carriage. It has been stated that

---

[1] FRUS from the years 1914 to 1916 contain numerous example of such complaints. These complaints ranged from the seizure of a few to many hundreds of bags of mail.

Germany was able to send some code messages to America with the aid of the Swedish Government who passed these messages through their own diplomatic channels.[1] Such messages sent to the United States normally went via Buenos Aires,[2] and it usually required a week for them to reach their destination.[3] Due to its very nature, this method of direct communication with the United States was available to relatively few messages from the Central Powers.

Communication by private carriage was also a possible means of German communication with America, but, like the mails, this system lacked the speed which is so much a part of modern war. And, as will be seen later, at least on one occasion the British propagandists were able to make considerable profit from information seized when the Central Powers attempted to use private carriage.

It might also be well to point out that the German Government was allowed to send some messages directly over

---

1 Tuchman, op. cit., p. 103. Also, Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., Decision for War, 1917 (Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith Publisher, Inc., 1953), pp. 58-9.

2 Tuchman, op. cit., p. 103.

3 Ibid., p. 129.

the State Department cable.[1] This privilege was arranged by Colonel House and authorized by Wilson in the summer of 1915 during the Lusitania crisis.[2] Again, however, this communication route was available to only a relatively few German messages.

At this point it should be apparent that the British were not completely successful in their effort to stop all German communication with the outside world, but it should also be apparent that the British were able to greatly reduce the extent to which Germany and Austria were able to carry on normal communication with the outside world, particularly the United States.

Even a partial success in depriving the enemy of communication with the outside world was of great benefit to the British. One of the immediate advantages of depriving Germany of her communication with the outside world was that it aided the British blockade in disrupting German foreign trade. For, as Brownrigg has said in regard

---

[1] Ibid. Also, Spencer, op. cit., p. 59.

[2] Tuchman, op. cit., p. 132.

to the censorship:

> I much doubt if any more powerful weapon in enforcing the blockade and ruining the enemy's overseas trade ever existed, and I am confident that no office set up for war purpose was more efficiently or quietly run than the postal censorship.[1]

The British were so successful in this effort that Page wrote to Bryan on January 20, 1915, that most of the cables stopped by the British were stopped to prevent trading with the enemy, and he continued, "telegraphing to Germany or to neutral countries which promote trade with Germany must therefore be done by some other means than British cables if there be any other."[2] And, Harris, the American Consul at Stockholm, notified Lansing on September 8, 1915, that arrangements had finally been made so that wireless messages from Stockholm to America could be sent by wireless via Nauen, Germany. "The object . . . is to become emancipated as far as possible from the English telegraph system whose censors worry and harass Swedish business men to such an extent that it is almost

---

[1] Brownrigg, op. cit., pp. 199-200.

[2] FRUS, 1915 Supplement, op. cit., p. 701.

impossible to do business at all."[1]

Censorship may have also somewhat hampered the official communication of the Central Powers with their representatives in the United States. For, it was no longer possible for such communications by cable, and, at least until the summer of 1915, such communications could not be sent in code unless a copy of that code was on file with the American Government. And, as the British navy ruled the seas, apparently communication by diplomatic courier was also hampered because of possible British capture. Thus, the diplomats of the Central Powers turned to such alternative means of communication as private carriage and the so-called "Swedish Roundabout."

However, of even greater handicap to the German propagandists was the fact that their news was censored by their enemy.[2] This was a great handicap to the German propagandists because they were not able to receive an

---

[1] Ibid., p. 725.

[2] Peterson, op. cit., p. 135.

adequate supply of information from abroad. As Peterson stated, "Dernberg [the leading German propagandist] did not know what the American government was doing, what the British government planned to do, or what his own government was considering."[1] It might also be noted that war news from Germany was difficult to obtain in America. As one magazine reported:

> . . . no German publications of any sort are allowed to go through England to the United States. Tons of such publications--newspapers, periodicals, books, pamphlets--confiscated in transit, are stacked in the Censor's office in London.[2]

This lack of communication on the part of the German propagandists, coupled with the fact that most German propaganda was apparently not framed in a manner that appealed to most Americans, explains to a great extent why the German propaganda failed to gain much support in America.

A second key manner in which the British propagandists were successfully able to use censorship and news control was

---

[1] Ibid., p. 137.

[2] "Government Control of the Press," Nation, CV September 13, 1917), 288.

in their effort to hide German victories. As was stated in the first chapter, one of the major British propaganda techniques was to make it appear as though the Allied cause was bound to be successful. Therefore, with the initial German victories and the later stalemate in the conflict, it became necessary for the British to hide the German military successes.

The extent to which the British censors were able to hide German military victories was testified to by Page when he wrote to Wilson on August 9, 1914, that he really did not know what was happening, "so strict is the censorship."[1] And, Page wrote to his son, Arthur, on November 6, 1914, that he had known for a week of the blowing up of a British dreadnaught, yet, he related to his son, nothing had appeared in the press about it.[2] One possible explanation for the suppression of this and other similar stories was given by Brownrigg when he characterized Winston Churchill, the First Lord of the Admiralty, as "a bit of a gambler--i.e., he would hold onto a bit of bad news for a time on the chance of getting a bit of

---

1 Hendrick, op. cit., II, 310.

2 Ibid., p. 344.

good news to publish as an offset . . . ."[1]

One of the most outstanding examples of this use of censorship occurred when the Battleship Audacious was sunk by a mine on October 27, 1914. The news of this sinking was not made public until after the armistice was signed four years later.[2] In fact, Brownrigg has stated that a certain New York paper ran a picture of the Audacious along with a story describing the work that had been done on her while in dock, when in reality it had already been destroyed.[3]

The readers of Harper's Weekly were warned to be aware of this type of news control when they read on November 28, 1914:

> Beware . . . of vagueness in official reports. A grain of detail is usually more important than a ton of generality in any official report. If you read that "the Germans have advanced somewhat at B____; our forces have made good progress elsewhere," you may assume that the German advance was more important than the Allies' progress.[4]

---

1 Brownrigg, op. cit., p. 27.

2 Ibid., pp. 46-8.

3 Ibid., p. 47.

4 A. Bennett, "Public and the Censor," Harper's Weekly, LIX, (November 28, 1914), pp. 508-9.

The extent to which the British were able to suppress German military successes, as well as Allied weaknesses, was very great indeed. As one student of the period has stated, "perhaps only a handful of soldiers, politicians, and diplomatists in the warring governments really know how desperate was the Allies situation."[1] It might, however, be added that at least some of the leading American politicians and bankers must have had some indication of how desperate the Allied situation was when the question of a much needed loan came up in 1915. At the outbreak of the war it had not been necessary for the Allies to borrow money with which to make purchases in the United States. But, as these funds were used up, it became apparent that if these huge purchases of war materials were to continue, a loan would be necessary.[2] Naturally the loss of this huge volume of trade would have been disasterous for the American economy, but it can also be assumed that the loss of this huge source of supply would have been equally

---

[1] Walter Millis, Road to War: America 1914-1917 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935), p. 371.

[2] Thomas A. Bailey, Diplomatic History of the American People (New York: F. S. Crofts and Co., 1946), p. 622.

disasterous to the British military effort.[1] This point could not have escaped the attention of the American politicians and bankers.

The British propagandists were also able to use the censorship as a valuable source of information. It has been said that the British censor summarized all of the information thus obtained and sent his reports to the departments which might be interested in the particular intelligence.[2] It will later be seen that this practice worked to the disadvantage of the British in certain cases. However, at least in some cases, the information obtained by the British censorship and British intelligence was used by the British propagandists to achieve great propaganda victories. Peterson has stated that in order to fully exploit the information obtained

---

1 The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present (Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, Inc., Revised Ed., 1965), p. 552. The volume of trade between Great Britain and the United States in 1915 amounted to $912,000,000 as compared to only $29,000,000 worth of American trade with Germany in that same year.

2 Peterson, op. cit., p. 15.

by the censorship, Captain Guy Gaunt made arrangements whereby John R. Tathom of the Providence (Rhode Island) Journal would give the British disclosures the widest publicity.[1]

One example of this use of censorship occurred on September 1, 1915, when the British removed James J. Archibald from a ship that was being searched at Falmouth.[2] Archibald was found to be carrying papers from Dr. Dumba, the Austrian Ambassador to the United States, to his government. Included among these was a plan proposed by Dumba to induce Hungarians working in munitions plants in the United States to go on strike.[3] Also included among the documents seized from Archibald was a letter from von Papen, the German Military Attache in the United States, to his wife. In this letter he remarked, " . . . How splendid on the Eastern Front! I always say to these idiotic Yankees that they should shut their mouths and better still be full of admiration for all that

---

[1] Ibid., p. 153.

[2] Captain Henry Landau, The Enemy Within (New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1937), p. 52.

[3] Robert Lansing, War Memoirs of Robert Lansing (Indianapolis: The Bobs-Merrill Company, 1935), pp. 63-4.

heroism."[1] Copies of these documents were promptly turned over to the Government of the United States, and, in the words of Landau, "motivated by a fine unselfishness," the British also released the text of the documents to the press.[2]

The result was, of course, a great propaganda victory for the British. As was expected, the incident kindled much resentment in the United States for the Central Powers. In the words of Secretary of State Lansing, " . . . the incident aroused much criticism of Doctor Dumba in the press of this country."[3]

A second example of the way in which the British were able to gain propaganda victories from information obtained through the censorship was in the case of the now famous Zimmermann telegram. This message was intercepted by the British on January 17, 1917.[4] The telegram, to the German Ambassador in Mexico, announced that Germany was about to resume unrestricted submarine warfare, and it ordered him

---

1 Landau, op. cit., p. 53.

2 Ibid., p. 52.

3 Lansing, op. cit., p. 64.

4 Tuchman, op. cit., p. 3.

to make an offer of an alliance with Mexico in the event that the United States did not remain neutral after submarine warfare was resumed. In return for this alliance he was instructed to offer the Mexican Government generous financial support, and an understanding that Mexico was to regain her lost territory in Texas, New Mexico, and Arizona.[1]

The telegram was not turned over to the American Government until February 23, 1917, when it was presented to Ambassador Page. The impact of the telegram was immediate. In fact, Polk, the Acting Secretary of State, has reported that Wilson was so aroused that he wanted to release it at once, without taking time to even think about it. Polk suggested that he at least wait until Lansing had been consulted.[2] The telegram also aroused great indignation throughout the country when it was made public on March 1, 1917. The great propaganda value of the telegram was attested to by Spring Rice on March 1, when he wrote to Balfour that, "the feeling of exasperation against Germany is naturally growing greater

---

1 Ibid., p. 146.

2 Ibid., p. 169.

every day."[1] And it was again shown on March 9th when he wrote to Balfour that, "feeling in Congress was already to a considerable extent exasperated against Germany when the Mexican revelation took place. The first effect was greatly to increase the irritation."[2]

To the propagandists the telegram was of great value because it presented the war to the Americans in a different perspective. It now appeared not as a European war between Great Britain and Germany, but rather as a conflict which also threatened the territory of the United States. It has been said that after the Zimmermann telegram was released the Omaha World-Herald, which had tried to remain neutral, now stated that there could be no neutrality when the issue shifted from Germany against Great Britain to Germany against the United States.[3] And, the anti-war Detroit Times wrote:

> Regretful as the case may be, it looks like war for this country of ours, with only one thing left to praise God for, and that, if a war comes, that it

---

1 Gwynn, op. cit., p. 384.

2 Ibid., p. 385.

3 Samuel R. Spencer, Jr., Decision for War, 1917 (Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith, Publishers, 1953), pp. 80-2.

was not our making.[1]

The disclosure of the Zimmermann telegram was such an effective piece of propaganda that, in the opinion of at least one student of the period, within a week most people became convinced that war with Germany could not be avoided.[2] The Boston Globe was said to have reflected the opinion of many newspapers in the country when it wrote, "if Germany wants war with us, she shall have it."[3]

Thus, Great Britain was able to use her censorship and news control apparatus, in combination with her intelligence department, to obtain some of the most outstanding propaganda victories of the war.

The goals of the British censorship and news control apparatus did not stop at cutting the enemies means of communication, hiding the extent of German victories and Allied weaknesses, and using the information obtained from censorship to further the cause of Great Britain. In fact, it was one of the major goals of this apparatus to control all of the

---

1 Ibid., p. 83.

2 Idem.

3 Ibid., p. 84.

news going to the United States that it was possible for them to control.

The British position, astride the major routes of communication, of course, gave the British considerable advantage in this news control effort. In addition, the British had a second advantage in that London had always been one of the worlds chief exchange and clearing houses for news.[1] Thus, it was relatively simple for Great Britain to exert considerable influence on the news which passed to the United States from Europe.

Most of the news bound for the United States had to pass over the British cables, and it was, therefore, easy for Great Britain to censor what stories the British did not want to pass.

However, it should also be noted that Great Britain was also able to influence the American press in other less objectionable ways. By such means as official press releases, beautiful chateaux' at the front for correspondents and other

---

[1] Villard, op. cit., pp. 80-1.

visitors,[1] numerous press interviews with leading British personalities, tours of the Grant Fleet, etc., the English were able to influence the news passing to America. As Brownrigg has related, "every newspaper representative was, pace,[2] Mr. Montgomery of the Press Bureau, most important."[3]

The British were also able to influence the news going to America by exercising some control over the English press. As most of the American newspapers were greatly dependent upon the advance sheets of various British newspapers for their war news,[4] it was possible for the English to influence the news bound for America by exerting some control over what the press in England wrote. The powers granted to the Government by the Defense of the Realm Act gave the Press Bureau the authority to exercise such influence over the press in England. In exercising this authority the Press Bureau worked

---

1 "Governments Control of the Press," Nation, Vol. 105 (September 13, 1917), p. 288.

2 "In effect."

3 Brownrigg, op. cit., p. 95.

4 e.g., The New York Times bought the advance sheets of The London Daily Chronicle. Elmer Davis, History of the New York Times (New York: The New York Times, 1921), p. 366.

very closely with the Foreign Office.[1] However, upon orders from Grey this practice was ended on December 20, 1915, in favor of a system whereby the publishers of the various newspapers were expected to shoulder the responsibility themselves of seeing to it that nothing was published which would in any way prejudice His Majesty's relations with Foreign Powers.[2] However, the new policy adopted by the Foreign Office was not adopted by the other Departments, and the Press Bureau continued to censor in all other cases as before.[3] Thus, such things as the sinking of the Audacious was reported neither in the English press or in its American counterpart.

The propagandists also found that control over what the press in England wrote could be used to keep that press from offending the United States. Page warned the President of this tactic on Februrary 15, 1916, when he wrote, "the Cabinet has directed the Censor to suppress, as far as he can with prudence, comment which is unfavorable to the United

---

1 Sir Edward Cook, The Press in War-Time (London: MacMillan and Co., 1920), p. 119.

2 Ibid., p. 120.

3 Ibid., p. 121.

States."[1] And, again he wrote after the President's peace communication of December 18, 1916, that publications of the note in the British press was withheld for several hours in order to give the government a chance to control editorial opinion, "otherwise it was feared that this would be so unrestrained in its bitterness that relations with the United States might be imperilled."[2] It is also interesting to note that Spring Rice in his letters to Grey frequently made such comments as, " . . . the President is very sensitive to British criticism, especially the criticism of the Spectator."[3]

In general the British appear to have been successful in their efforts to control most of the news that went to the United States from Europe.[4] Indeed, the reports of Sir Gilbert Parker to the British Cabinet reveal a satisfaction with the British control over the American press. According to Peterson the following excerpts are typical:

---

1 Page, op. cit., II, 51.

2 Ibid., pp. 205-6.

3 Gwynn, op. cit. p. 266.

4 Millis, op. cit., p. 62.

> May 31: The American Press as a whole is friendly to the Allied and is anxious to give our point of view.
>
> August 23: The current week is remarkable for the large number of interviews from British sources.
>
> October 11: The week supplies satisfactory evidence of the permeation of the American press by British influence . . . . [1]

This view of the British success in controlling the news going to America was also shared by Joseph Grew, the Secretary of the American legation in Berlin, who, after his family had sent newspaper clippings implying his gullibility, wrote home:

> . . . you yourselves from the first have received your news and impressions from one country and one country only. Every single cablegram to America, whether from hostile, neutral, or friendly countries, passes through England and there they are so carefully censored that you are absolutely in the dark as to the other side of the question.[2]

At this point it should be clear that Great Britain gained a great many successes, both propaganda and other, from the use of censorship and news control. In general,

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., pp. 233-4.

[2] Joseph C. Grew, Turbulent Era 1904-1945 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952), I, 158. He was in fact incorrect, because cables could also come via France or Siberia.

the goals of the censorship and news control effort were achieved.

However, as the next chapter will make clear, there were a number of thorns among the roses of success.

CHAPTER IV

DRAWBACKS TO CENSORSHIP AND NEWS CONTROL AS A METHOD OF PROPAGANDA

The British censorship and news control campaign was in reality an effort on the part of Great Britain to control as much as possible the information that passed back and forth across the Atlantic concerning the war. In this effort the English were for the most part successful. However, this was not done without causing much irritation.

One of the very first complaints to arise in the United States after the outbreak of the war concerned the British censorship regulations. This complaint arose not from the general public but from those who used the British cables. It was found that the censorship regulations requiring plain language and full addresses greatly increased the cost of using the cables, for it was no longer possible to use condensation, code addresses, etc., as was the usual procedure. Thus as early as August 11, 1917, Western Union requested that the Government of the United States make "such representations to the British Government as will be calculated to admit of a more reasonable attitude with respect to the

censorship of cable messages . . . ."[1] The request from Western Union made note of the fact that such requirements as full addresses and full signature had cut down the capacity of the cables by fifty per cent due to the increased length of each message, and it also noted that the company was forbidden from making any inquiries regarding the delivery of messages.[2] Page, in London, was instructed to make such representations to the British Government on August 15, 1914,[3] and similar instructions were received by him several times thereafter.

This inconvenience was only a minor source of friction between the United States and Great Britain, but it did affect some of the very people and groups that the British propagandists hoped to win the support of, i.e. newspapers and commercial firms. It cannot be stated that this practice alone cost the propagandists the support of a certain number of newspapers or commercial houses, but it was not the type of procedure

---

1 FRUS, 1914 Supplement, op. cit., p. 504.

2 Idem.

3 Ibid., pp. 505-6.

which was likely to win friends. In fact, it was reported in Review of Reviews that one of the great New York dailies had sent an editor to London merely to take out needless words from cable messages due to the higher tolls.[1]

Of even more importance was the irritation that censorship and news control caused because of its interference with commercial transactions. Throughout the entire period of American neutrality the British policies in regard to neutral trade was a source of constant friction.

As regards the British censorship one of the major complaints was that Great Britain was suppressing purely commercial messages between neutral nations. Early in the war Lansing notified Page that the State Department had received a great many complaints from throughout the nation in regard to the suppression by the British censors of cable communications to and from neutral countries. With this in mind he requested that Page present the matter to the Foreign Office with the suggestion that the State Department deemed

---

[1] Villard, op. cit., p. 79.

it desirable that the suppression of commercial messages be discontinued.[1]

The dispute was of course not solved with this early protest on the part of the United States, but rather it continued to be one of the major disputes between Great Britain and the United States for several years to come. Indeed, the protest which Great Britain received over this issue did not end with just the United States. Other neutral nations joined with the United States in objecting to the British practice of censoring and suppressing commercial messages. On November 12, 1914, Bryan notified Page that Danish firms were protesting that the English censorship was ruining business between that country and the United States, and it was requested by Bryan that Page present the matter to the Foreign Office.[2] Switzerland also joined Denmark and the United States in voicing protest against the British censorship and suppression of commercial messages.[3]

---

1 FRUS, 1914 Supplement, op. cit., p. 514.

2 Ibid., p. 515.

3 Ibid., p. 518.

The matter was, of course, not as completely one sided as it might appear, for Great Britain was apparently convinced, perhaps with some justification, that many of the messages which her censors suppressed were actually messages involving trade that would eventually end up in Germany. The British made this point clear to Ambassador Page, for, after a conference with Grey and the chief censors, Page wrote to Bryan on December 11, 1914, "they strongly protested that they do not aim to impede neutral commerce."[1] And, he continued, "they say certain German banks and institutions in the United States have devised most ingenious codes which they use in most innocent looking telegrams."[2]

This explanation of the actions of the British censors was, however, of no avail when confronted with American complaints of British interference with messages concerning trade with areas outside of Europe. Bryan notified Page of this type interference on December 22, 1914, when he related that the Governor General of the Philippines had reported

---

1 Ibid., p. 525.

2 Idem.

that business firms there were suffering serious loss due to the delay in the transmission of purely commercial cablegrams by the British censors.[1] Page was again informed of this type British interference on May 13, 1915, when Bryan wrote that nine cablegrams from Rio de Janeiro to the United States concerning coffee shipments had not been delivered. With this, Page was directed to bring it to the attention of the Foreign Office that the suppression of commercial messages of a neutral character between the United States and South America could, "only serve as a detriment to legitimate business entirely outside the war zone . . . "[2]

The censors interference with and suppression of commercial messages was naturally a drawback to the propagandists' efforts to enlist the support of the United States. This was especially true because of the fears and suspicions which this practice aroused in the minds of many Americans. For, in the words of Baker, "many American businessmen were

---

[1] International Law Review, op. cit., p. 297.

[2] Ibid., p. 312.

convinced that their trade secrets and confidential dealings with Europe were becoming known to British officials and being used for the advantage of British traders."[1]

The suspicions that England was using the trade secrets gained from the censorship were not without some justification. Incidents such as the above mentioned interferences with non-European trade would naturally lead some merchants to suspect that the British harboured certain ulterior motives for the censorship establishment. In addition, the long delay in the delivery of messages to and from Europe due to the censorship must also have led many to believe that the messages were being delayed to help British commercial interest. Lansing remarked that it was generally held by American businessmen that many letters of a purely commercial nature and unrelated to contraband were being copied by the censors, and that these copies were being forwarded to the London Board of Trade for its information and for such use as it might deem advisable in

---

[1] Baker, op. cit., VI, 313.

advancing the commercial interest of Great Britain.[1] Suspicions of this type apparently even reached into the Cabinet. This was evident in a May 5, 1915, letter from Secretary of the Interior Lane to Colonel House. In this letter Lane remarked, "can it be that she [England] is trying to take advantage of the war to hamper our trade."[2]

Fears and suspicions of this type would, of course, do great injury to the propagandist's efforts in gaining the support of the American people. As Spring Rice warned Grey on September 15, 1916, "It would be very dangerous for us if it appeared that our assurances with regard to our policy toward neutrals [assurances of not using trade secrets gained by censorship] were not born out in fact."[3] In order to counter these fears and suspicions, the British Government emphatically denied on several occasions that the censorship was being used for any purpose of this type. One such denial was given to Lansing on August 15, 1916, when Spring Rice

---

1 Lansing, op. cit., p. 127.

2 Seymour, op. cit., I, 459.

3 Gwynn, op. cit., p. 348.

delivered the following statement:

> Any such use of censorship is directly contrary to the policy of His Majesty's Government and contrary to their orders . . . .
> His Majesty's Government have no reason to suppose that any such offense has actually taken place and they have no evidence of it . . . .[1]

However, according to Lansing, not even the fact that the American Ambassador to London had denied that the British were engaged in such improper practices could calm the suspicions, for, "the circumstances seemed to justify the suspicions."[2] Thus, as a result of censorship, the propagandist had to deal with fears and suspicions which, in the words of Lansing, "worked to the direct benefit of Britain's competitors . . . ."[3]

Censorship and news control also had certain drawbacks in regard to the propagandist's efforts to gain the support of the American press. It cannot, of course, be said that censorship made the American press hostile to Great Britain, because generally the press in America was

---

1 FRUS, 1916 Supplement, op. cit., p. 618.

2 Lansing, op. cit., p. 127.

3 Ibid., p. 125.

at least somewhat favorably disposed toward Great Britain and the Allies. However, the censorship and news control tactics of the British certainly did not contribute toward that good will.

In fact the American news media of the period contains many protests against the British censorship and news control practices. Generally these protests were opposed to the efforts of the censors and the Press Bureau in determining what news should be allowed to cross the Atlantic. As one periodical of the period summed up the situation:

> Urbane fatuity has rarely I suppose, been carried further in any Government department than in the British Press Bureau and by the half-pay officers who were installed at its orders in the cable companies offices. These wondrous gentlemen simply blue-penciled everything that came before them . . . .[1]

Or, as the Nation commented upon the situation:

> To the wholesome indignation of the American Press, it [the Press Bureau] vexatiously delays, sometimes absolutely prohibits, transmission of costly cable dispatches conveying news that has for days been broadcast in the European press.[2]

---

[1] Sidney Brooks, "The Press in War Time," North American Review, CC (December, 1914), p. 869.

[2] "Censorship Abroad," Nation, IC (October 29, 1914), p. 517.

In addition several of the periodicals of the era charged that the press censorship of Great Britain was depriving the news media of the ability to perform one of its primary functions in a democratic society--the formation of public opinion. The North American Review contained one clear example of this charge when it published the following:

> Both England and the United States are blessed with systems of government that give to the Press a power that is inconceivable in countries where everything is subordinated to preparing for success on the day of Armageddon. The press with us not only disseminates news, but shapes the thoughts of the nation more constantly and with greater effect than any other instrument . . . . That is a condition with which the military and naval authorities have to reckon . . . in devising any sort of a Press censorship. They should remember that in gagging the Press they are gagging not only a news agency, but a molder of public opinion.[1]

This charge against the British censorship was also evident in an article published by Literary Digest. This article related that, when The Nation (London) was prohibited from entering the United States by the British censors, the Manchester Guardian wrote:

> . . . in newly freed Russia and in America, always

---

[1] Brooks, op. cit., p. 864.

> free, it is safe to assume that this example of British regard for a form of freedom hitherto somewhat jealously cherished will be received with astonishment verging on incredulity.[1]

The news media and business community were not the only Americans to be angered by the censorship and news control campaign of Great Britain. Indeed a portion of the general population seems to have been at least somewhat disturbed by the censorship.

One segment of the American population which was to a greater or lesser extent disturbed by the censorship was that part which had friends or relatives in the territory of the Central Powers. The censorship blocked easy communication between these Americans and their friends and relations among the Central Powers. And, it was, therefore, a constant source of irritation to these people. Lansing referred to this problem in a letter to Spring Rice on September 25, 1914, when he said that the State Department has received several complaints from American citizens to the effect that their letters to relatives in Germany had not reached their

---

[1] "Too Dangerous for Us to Read." Literary Digest, LIV (May 21, 1917), 1413.

destination.[1] Indeed, people with this problem may well have been the same people whose letters prompted Senator Stone to question the Secretary of State as to the United States policy toward the censorship. In this letter of inquiry, Senator Stone, asked among other things, why the United States allowed communication by submarine cable while it censored wireless messages, and why the United States tolerated the censorship, and in some cases the destruction, of American letters found on neutral vessels.[2]

It may have been impossible for the propagandists to gain much support among this segment of the population anyway, but, when the censorship cut them off from easy communication with their friends and relatives, even that little hope of success for the British propaganda was probably diminished.

The mere inconvenience caused by the censorship probably also reduced the extent to which the propagandists were able to succeed in America. Spring Rice pointed to this

---

1 FRUS, 1914 Supplement, op. cit., p. 533.

2 International Law Review, op. cit., pp. 253-4.

problem in a letter to Grey on April 28, 1916, in which he said that the question of mail censorship touched upon the convenience of so many people that he feared that the excitement it caused against Great Britain would prove to be formidable. And, he concluded, "we are certainly invoking on our heads a great deal of indignation from many powerful people."[1] Spring Rice repeated this fear in a letter to Lord Robert Cecil on August 13, 1916, in which he said that people get satiated with horror they do not experience, but what they do experience is the inconvenience; and this they resent "more and more." And, he concluded, "thus you will understand that our difficulties are increasing here."[2]

In this regard, one student of the period has remarked that the German propagandists made a strong appeal to the American public by discussing the British interference with American trade and mail. This effort, he felt, was successful because it dealt with something which was of importance

---

1 Gwynn, op. cit., p. 331.

2 Ibid., p. 346.

to the United States.[1] It might be questioned by some whether German propaganda was responsible for the growing feeling of resentment toward Great Britain in the United States, but none can deny that there was such a growing sense of resentment toward the English in America. The following instruction from Lansing to Page, dated January 4, 1916, clearly illustrates that resentment toward Great Britain was growing as a result of the inconvenience caused by censorship:

> As a result of British action, strong feeling is being aroused in this country on account of the loss of valuable letters, money orders, and drafts, and foreign banks are refusing to cash American drafts owing to the absence of any security that the drafts will travel safely in the mails . . . Please lay this matter immediately before the British Government in a formal and vigorous protest and press for a discontinuance of these unwarranted interferences with invoilable mails . . . .[2]

The propagandists' problems which resulted from British censorship did not end with those mentioned above, for it should also be noted that many Americans simply resented the fact that the British censors were trying to control what war

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., p. 141.

[2] FRUS, 1916 Supplement, op. cit., p. 592.

news the American public were reading. As one periodical of the time wrote:

> . . . it is beyond the function of a foreign censor to say whether Americans shall or shall not receive news of a papal letter,[1] . . . and whether there is any news from Germany which British censors have a right to suppress.[2]

Spring Rice warned Lord Newton of this type danger early in the war when he commented that, " . . . people here don't like to be preached at; they like to think that they are neutral and make up their minds . . . . "[3] And, the danger of censorship hurting the public opinion of Great Britain was also alluded to in a letter from Theodore Roosevelt to Grey on January 22, 1915. In this letter Roosevelt warned Grey that he should consider whether much of the censorship work and the British refusal to allow correspondents at the front was not damaging the British cause from the public opinion standpoint without corresponding military gains.[4]

---

1 This apparently refers to a Papal prayer for peace which the censors suppressed early in the war. Villard, op. cit., p. 81.

2 Idem.

3 Gwynn, op. cit., p. 239.

4 Grey, op. cit., p. 151.

However, by 1916, the situation had reached the point that American opinion of Great Britain was apparently on somewhat of a decline. This decline in British prestige throughout 1916 was said to have been reflected in the reports of Wellington House to the British Cabinet. These reports began to contain such comments as:

> February 12: British cause has recently suffered a slight setback in the United States.
>
> May 25: . . . prestige of Great Britain in this country is at the lowest ebb since the war began.
>
> September 6: There is no doubt that pro-British sympathy in the United States . . . has recently undergone considerable modification.
>
> October 18: The outstanding feature of American opinion at the present time is a growing feeling against Great Britain.[1]

This decline in the prestige of Great Britain in the United States cannot be attributed solely to the irritations caused by the British censorship and news control effort. The decline in part reflected the growing conviction on the part of many that a stalemate had been reached in the war.[2]

---

[1] Peterson, op. cit., pp. 286-7.

[2] Peterson has stated that this was the most important single factor in the decline of British prestige in America.

However, it is also clear that irritations such as those mentioned above would at least contribute some toward the decline in British prestige. Thus, censorship and news control were in some ways a drawback to the propagandist's efforts.

Censorship and news control not only irritated the private citizens and business firms of the United States as well as those of the other neutral countries, but it also caused a great deal of friction between the governments of the United States and Great Britain.

This friction was clearly evident in any reading of the diplomatic correspondence which passed between these two governments, and most particularly in the correspondence which passed between the American State Department and the American Ambassador in London. Throughout the entire period Page never ceased to receive periodic instructions from Washington to make protest to the British Government over some aspect of or incident which had occurred because of the British censorship.

The Government of the United States made a considerable number of representations to the British Government as a

result of British censorship of cable messages. But, even more representations were made to that Government as a result of the censorship of the mails. With regard to the censorship of the cables, the United States contented itself to requesting clarification of the censorship regulations, and in certain cases to revisions in those censorship rules. However, in the case of mail censorship the United States protested that Great Britain had no right to force neutral vessels into British ports for purpose of search, and when there to subject the mails on board such vessels to local censorship laws.[1] The United States further contended that when neutral ships merely touched at British ports the British had no right, according to international law, to either remove sealed mail bags, or to censor the mails on board ship.[2]

In response to these protests England normally asked for specific information about the particular incident of the protest. However, in response to a Lansing note of

---

[1] FRUS, 1916 Supplement, op. cit., p. 52.

[2] Idem.

protest dated January 4, 1916, the governments of Great Britain and France issued a joint response on April 3, 1916. This response gave several justifications for the British censorship actions, these were: (1) Germany had not only censored mails, but had actually sunk mail boats without American protest, (2) the British and French contended that the mails contained contraband of war bound for Germany, (3) it was further stated that the Allies would pass actual correspondence, but that they reserved the right to inspect the mails to insure that it was in fact correspondence, and (4) it was contended that the Hague convention did not bar them from stopping contraband of war, and that it was necessary for them to search the mails to stop the contraband which might be contained therein.[1]

With this impass, the relations between the United States and Great Britain began to deteriorate during much of the remainder of the year 1916.

The efforts of the British propagandists to enlist the support of the United States thus suffered a great deal in

---

[1] Ibid., pp. 599-600.

1916 as a result of the censorship and news control campaign. Indeed, it is significant that Spring Rice repeatedly urged his government to make concessions whenever necessary. The strain in relations between the United States and Great Britain, and Spring Rice's urging for concessions are evident in the following Spring Rice letter to Lord Cecil, dated August 13, 1916:

> Do not depend solely on official reports nor solely on unofficial reports. But obtain independent information from as many sides as possible. The object should be to ascertain when the breaking point is near and where. Do not deceive yourself as to that. If it approaches you may have to concede a point or two.[1]

The concern of Spring Rice was again apparent in a letter to Lord Grey dated September 15, 1916, in which he related that he had just seen a good friend at the State Department who bursted out in, "a long and violent diatribe against all our proceedings, which he said were doing us more harm than the Germans had ever done." And, Spring Rice continued, his friend was known as being rather "pro-ally" . . . . "The case is significant."[2]

---

[1] Gwynn, op. cit., p. 345.

[2] Ibid., p. 349.

The fears of Spring Rice seemed to reflect the mood of Washington during much of 1916. For, it is evident that the Administration was becoming greatly concerned over the controversies with Great Britain. As Page later remarked in regard to his September 1916 interview with Wilson, "he showed a great degree of toleration for Germany; and he was, during the whole morning that I talked with him, complaining of England."[1] While Colonel House wrote, after a meeting with Captain Guy Gaunt on May 23, 1916, that he was told that the British Ambassador was much exercised at the harshness of the American note on mail seizures and he was told that the Ambassador thought that the same objective might have been accomplished by a softer tone. In response to this, House recorded that he was not sure that the Ambassador was right, "it looks as if a club was necessary before they take any notice."[2]

With such attitudes prevalent in the Administration, it can seriously be questioned whether the censorship was

---

[1] Hendrick, op. cit., II, 222.

[2] Seymour, op. cit., II, 310.

doing the British more good than harm. Apparently Spring Rice did not think the censorship and news control effort to be worthwhile, for he wrote in August, 1916 that it might be well to consider whether it is worthwhile to insist on the telegraph and news censorship on press messages and journals of German origin. For he continued, "I think that the American people are rather apt to resent having their views ready made for them, and the German press campaign may do the Germans more harm than good."[1]

At this point it should be clear that there were many thorns among the successes which the British propagandists were able to achieve through the use of censorship and news control. It remains the task of the final chapter to conclude which was the more important--the roses or the thorns.

---

[1] Gwynn, op. cit., p. 346.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In summarizing a study of the use of censorship and news control as a method of propaganda, it must first be made clear that propaganda was not the sole justification for the existence of the censoring apparatus. As censorship and news control was useful to the propagandists, it was also of considerable value to the military aspects of the war. For, censorship could be, and was, used to prevent valuable information from falling into enemy hands. And, censorship was also of great value in aiding the British blockade of Germany. Thus, by contributing toward the disruption of the enemies' much needed foreign trade, censorship contributed toward the eventual military defeat of the enemy.

However, as propaganda is the theme of this thesis, it is, of course, necessary to point out that censorship and news control did serve as a useful tool in the hands of the British propagandists. It gave the propagandists considerable advantage over his German counterpart from the very beginning in that the British propagandist was able to exert considerable control over his enemies methods of communication. To the

propagnadist, the value of being able to control much of the communication bound for his German counterpart in the United States cannot be over estimated.

Not only did the censorship and news control enable the British propagandist to exert control over the enemies means of communication, but it also enabled him to hide from the American public much of the German success on the field of battle. Along with this, censorship and news control also enabled the propagandist to hide the extent of his weaknesses from the public he was attempting to win to his cause. Apparently on the assumption that no one would care to risk supporting a loosing cause.

It has also been noted that censorship and news control enabled the British propagandist to gain valuable information concerning the activities of his enemy. This, the British propagandists were able, at least in a few cases, to turn into some of the most outstanding propaganda achievements of the war. This was particularly the case in such propaganda victories as the Archibald revelation and the Zimmermann Telegram release.

The many uses for which the propagandists were able to make of censorship and news control did not stop here. For, they were able to use this apparatus with a considerable amount of success in no less an effort than that of controlling as much as possible all of the war news bound for the United States from the scene of the conflict.

However, in summarizing the use of censorship and news control as a method of propaganda, it must also be pointed out that it brought with it many drawbacks, some of which were considerable in their magnitude.

The first of these drawbacks in the use of censorship was that the regulations imposed by the censors created much irritation for those who used the cables as a means of communication. This, because of the increased cost of cabling due to the prohibiting of the normal methods of condensation, and also because the sender was not notified in cases where the censors refused to permit the delivery of certain cablegrams.

To this it must also be added that censorship created much irritation among the American commercial interests because of the delays caused by the censorship, and in certain cases the refusal of the censors to pass given telegrams.

Irritations of this type were of importance to the propagandists because they most affected some of the key segments of the American society which the propagandists hoped to win to the British cause--i.e., businessmen and newspapers.

Censorship was also a major drawback to the propagandists efforts to gain support among the American people because of the fears and suspicions which it aroused. It became the conviction of many American citizens that the British were using secrets gained from the censorship to advance British commercial interests at the expense of American business.[1]

Censorship and news control, of course, created a certain amount of resentment in the American press. That important body of Americans generally felt that the censors of a foreign country had no right to determine what news was safe and what was not for Americans to read. And, part of this group was apparently of the opinion that the British censorship and news control was depriving them of their ability to perform their task as one of the leading opinion

---

[1] Baker, loc. cit.

makers in a democratic society.

Of course, censorship and news control also angered many average American citizens, who felt, as did the press, that it was not proper for the Government of a foreign nation to exercise control over what they were to read. To the British propagandists this type of resentment was of course an obstacle in the path of his efforts to win the support of the American people.

But, perhaps the greatest drawback created by the use of censorship and news control was the friction it caused between the Government of Great Britain and the Government of the United States. This friction became so great in 1916, that Colonel House, as has already been noted, came to feel that it might be necessary to use a "club" in order to maintain the rights of a neutral.

One thing should be clear at this point, and that is that there were a great number of both advantages and disadvantages in the use of censorship and news control as a method of propaganda. And, it is, of course, difficult to determine whether one of these factors outweighted the other.

It is readily apparent that censorship and news control

were of great utility to the propagandist in his efforts to enlist the support of the United States. As one student of British--American relations has pointed out, in the period of American neutrality, except for a period in 1916, the pro-Ally sentiment in the United States steadily increased throughout the war. This increase in pro-Ally sentiment Allen attributed to the British propaganda effort, and most especially to the British use of censorship and news control. British censorship, he maintained, so disrupted the enemies means of communication that the British view of any situation had normally been accepted in America long before the German view had even arrived.[1]

It might, however, he added that this and similar views may be guilty of some exageration, because censorship, news control, and propaganda were not the only factors which contributed toward an increase in pro-Ally sentiment in the United States. The huge increase in trade between the United States and Britain, coupled with a sharp drop in German-American trade, would naturally have had a certain impact upon

---

[1] H. C. Allen, Great Britain and the United States (New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1955), pp. 652-3.

the attitudes which Americans held toward these two nations.[1] It should also be pointed out that German mistakes, whether in the realm of propaganda or of military action, also had an impact on American sentiment. Thus, such events as the invasion of Belgium and the sinking of the Lusitania aided pro-Ally sentiment in America. In addition, it should also be noted that France, who had aided America in its' revolution, was one of the Allies. Certainly this did not hurt British sentiment in America.

In the final analysis, it must also be remembered that propaganda was not the sole reason for the existence of British censorship. As was pointed out earlier, censorship was of considerable value to the military.

However, it can be questioned as to whether the gains thus achieved justified the risks which were taken because of censorship and news control. For there was always a possibility that the United States might use a "club" to gain its' rights as a neutral. Lansing spoke of one such possibility when he wrote:

> I have wondered sometimes what would have been the result if . . . Bernstorff's advice had prevailed . . .

> and if submarine warfare had been abandoned . . . . Would not the American people become more and more irritated at the British disregard for their rights . . . ? Could a clash with the British navy have been avoided? And would a clash have resulted in war?[1]

Senator Hoke Smith, a spokesman for southern cotton-growers, spoke of a second possible "club" when he warned the President that it might be difficult to prevent the next Congress from passing an embargo resolution if England and France did not modify their interferences with neutral rights.[2]

Through the use of that marvelous instrument called hindsight, it is now, of course, apparent that Great Britain was able to reap many of the benefits to be had from censorship and news control without suffering all of the possible consequences. Yet, even with this knowledge, it is difficult to determine whether the gains were worth the irritations and risks involved in censorship and news control.

It might even be questioned whether at least one of the propaganda techniques was not in error in its' basic assumption. It has been shown that the British used censorship and

---

[1] Lansing, op. cit., p. 41.

[2] Seymour, op. cit., II, 70.

news control in an effort to hide German victories and thus to make it appear as though the Allies were bound to win. This technique was apparently based upon the assumption that it would be good for morale if it appeared that the British cause was winning. However, it is possible that such propaganda might have bred complacency rather than the hoped for high morale. After all, success was "inevitable."

BIBLIOGRAPHIC ENTRIES

A. BOOKS

Allen, H. C. Great Britain and the United States. New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1955.

Bailey, Thomas A. Diplomatic History of the American People. New York: F. S. Crofts and Company, 1946.

Bemis, Samual Flagg. A Diplomatic History of the United States. Fourth Edition. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955.

Cook, Sir Edward. The Press in War-Time. London: MacMillan and Company, 1920.

Creel, George. The War, the World and Wilson. New York: Harper Brothers, 1920.

Davis, Elmer. History of the New York Times. New York: The New York Times, 1921.

Fess, Simeon Davidson. The Problems of Neutrality when the World is at War. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927.

Landau, Captain Henry. The Enemy Within. New York: G. P. Putman's Sons, 1937.

Lasswell, Harold Dwight. Propaganda Technique in the World War. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, 1927.

May, Ernest R. The World War and American Isolation; 1914-1917. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959.

Millis, Walter. Road to War: America 1914-1917. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1935.

Potter, Harley. The Origins of the Foreign Policy of Woodrow Wilson. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1937.

Paxson, Frederic. Pre-War Years; 1914-1917. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1936.

Peterson, Horace Cornelius. Propaganda for War; the Campaign Against American Neutrality 1914-1917, 1939.

Seymour, Charles. American Diplomacy During the World War. Hamdon, Conn.: Archon Books, 1964.

Sullivan, Mark. Our Times; The United States 1900-1925. Vol. V, "Over Here 1914-1918." New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1933.

Spencer, Samuel R., Jr. Decision for War, 1917. Rindge, New Hampshire: Richard R. Smith Publishers, Inc., 1953.

Squires, James Duane. British Propaganda at Home and in the United States from 1914 to 1917. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935.

Tuchman, Barbara. The Zimmermann Telegram. New York: MacMillan, 1966.

Ward, Sir A. W. The Cambridge History of British Foreign Policy. Vol. III. Cambridge: The University Press, 1923.

Vierreck, George Sylvester. Spreading Germs of Hate. London: Duckworth, 1931.

B. DOCUMENTS, LETTERS, AND PAPERS

Aggs, W. H. (ed.). Chitty's Statutes of Practical Utility, 1914-1917. Vol. XVIII. Sixth edition. London: Sweet and Maxwell, Limited and Stevens and Sons, Limited, 1917.

Baker, Ray Stannard. The Public Papers of Woodrow Wilson. Vols. V and VI. New York: Harper Brothers, 1925.

Churchill, Winston S. The World Crisis. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1923.

Grew, Joseph C. Turbulent Era 1904-1945. Vol. I. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1952.

Grey, Edward. Twenty-five Years. Vol. II. New York: Fredrick A. Stokes Co., 1925.

Hendrick, Burton Jesse. The Life and Letters of Walter Hines Page. Vols. I and II. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1922.

Lansing, Robert. The War Memoirs of Robert Lansing. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1935.

Perelma, Ossip. "M. E. S."-His Book. New York: Harper Brothers Publishers, 1918.

Seymour, Charles (ed.). The Intimate Papers of Colonel House. Vols. I and II. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1926.

Shaw, Albert (ed.). The Messages and Papers of Woodrow Wilson. Vol. I. New York: The Review of Reviews Corp., 1924.

The Statistical History of the United States from Colonial Times to the Present. Revised ed. Stamford, Conn.: Fairfield Publishers, Inc., 1965.

U. S., Department of State. Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1914-1917 Supplements. Washington: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1928-31.

C. PERIODICALS

"American Press on the War." Literary Digest, VI (September 11, 1915), 528-9.

Bennett, A. "Public and the Censor," Harpers Weekly, VIX (November 28, 1914), 508-10.

"Blue Pencil," Living Age, CCLXXXVII (December 18, 1915), 756-9.

Brooks, Sidney. "The Press in War Time," North American Review, CC (December, 1914), 558-69.

"Censorship Abroad," Nation, IC (October 29, 1914), 513-14.

"Censorship and False News," Nation, IC (September 3, 1914), 280.

"Censorship and Suppression," Nation, CIV (April 12, 1917), 424-5.

"Censorship and Britains Deadly Peril," Literary Digest, L (May 22, 1915), 1238.

"Conditions of War Correspondence," Spectator, CXIII (August 22, 1914), 257-8.

"Governments Control of the Press," Nation, CV (September 13, 1917), 283.

"News Embargo," North American Review, CCVIII (December, 1918), 831-41.

"Newspapers and the War," Harpers Weekly, LX (February 20, 1915), 184.

"Newspapers in Time of War," Living Age, CCLXXXV (June 5, 1915), 605-11.

"Offical Correspondence Relating to the Censorship of Telegrams Transmitted by Cable and Wireless," American Journal of International Law, IX (July, 1915), Special supplement, 270-313.

Parker, Sir Gilbert. "The United States and the War," Harpers Weekly, CXXXVI (March, 1918), 521-31.

"Press Censorship," Living Age, CCLXXXIV (January 9, 1915), 124-6.

Redwood, Hugh. "News in War Time," Contemporary, CVI (November, 1914), 651-7.

Shephard, G. "Forty-Two Centimeter Blue Pencil," Everybody's, XXXVI (April, 1917), 470-82.

"Too Dangerous for Us to Read," Literary Digest, LIV (May 21, 1917), 1413.

Villard, Oswald Garrison. "Press as Affected by War," Review of Reviews, LI (January, 1915), 79-83.

"War and the Press," Spectator, CXIII (August 15, 1914), 222-3.

"What the Censor Senses," Literary Digest, LIII (October 14, 1916), 967.